

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /026 W

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R 161340Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3046

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USINT ALGIERS

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 6863

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:

SUBJ: HIJACKING OF JORDANIAN PLANE

REF: STATE 244202

1. SUMMARY: DUE TO SKETCHY EVIDENCE, NO FIRM CONCLUSION EMERGES REGARDING MOTIVES BEHIND JORDANIAN HIJACKING. THREE HYPOTHESES ARE: A) LIBYAN-REJECTIONIST FRONT OPERATION; B) NONPOLITICAL CRIMINAL SMUGGLING AND C) PROTEST AGAINST OFFICIAL CORRUPTION BY IDEALISTIC SECURITY TYPES. IF FORCED TO CHOOSE, WE PICK LATTER MOTIVATION. IT IS ALSO SYMPTOMATIC OF ANTI-CORRUPTION GRUMBLING IN THE ARMY. END SUMMARY.

2. THUS FAR JORDANIAN INVESTIGATION OF NOVEMBER 6 HIJACKING BY THREE JORDANIAN SECURITY OFFICERS HAS FAILED TO PRODUCE A) ANY CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE WITH REGARD TO MOTIVES BEHIND HIJACKERS, OR B) INDICATION OF WIDER DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT. GIVEN ABSENCE ANY STATEMENT BY HIJACKERS, ANY CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE ABOVE ARE HIGHLY SPECULATIVE.

3. NEVERTHELESS, IF FORCED TO VENTURE AN ASSESSMENT WE WOULD
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CHOOSE THE LATTER OF THE FOLLOWING HYPOTHESES: A) HIJACKING WAS ENGINEERED BY LIBYAN-GOVERNMENT-PLO REJECTIONIST FRONT:

B) IT WAS A NONPOLITICAL CRIMINAL SMUGGLING OPERATION, OR
C) IT WAS A PROTEST GESTURE BY FRUSTRATED JORDANIAN SECURITY
PERSONNEL AGAINST CORRUPTION IN JORDANIAN GOVERNMENT.

4. WE BELIEVE EVIDENCE HIJACKING WAS LIBYAN-REJECTIONIST FRONT
OPERATION IS WEAK. ALTHOUGH THIS WAS GOJ'S INITIAL REACTION,
GOJ (AND EMBASSY) NOW DISCOUNTS THIS POSSIBILITY. INITIAL
ASSESSMENT TIED HIJACKING TO EARLIER (NOVEMBER 4) ALGIERS BROAD-
CAST FROM VOICE OF PALESTINE CLAIMING THAT FREE OFFICERS MOVEMENT
IN JORDAN WERE BEING ENCOURAGED TO REVOLT AGAINST KING. SINCE
THEN, HOWEVER, WE UNAWARE ANY FEDAYEEN GROUP HAS CLAIMED CREDIT
FOR OPERATION AND CERTAINLY LIBYAN GOVERNMENT HAS MUTED AFFAIR.
WE ALSO DO NOT ATTRIBUTE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE TO FACT PLANE
HIJACKED TO LIBYA, SINCE LIBYA KNOWN AS OPEN REFUGE FOR HIJACKERS.
WE ALSO ASSUME QADHAAFI'S STATEMENT (TRIPOLI 1193) AND LARG
ACTIONS SUGGEST LIBYANS THEMSELVES WERE SURPRISED BY HIJACKING.

5. ONLY EVIDENCE FOR HYPOTHESIS THAT HIJACKING WAS CRIMINAL
SMUGGLING OPERATION WAS ASSERTION WITHOUT SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
FROM JORDANIAN PRIME MINISTER (AMMAN 6643). SUBSEQUENT
INVESTIGATION HAS TURNED UP NO FURTHER SUCH EVIDENCE ALTHOUGH
LATER CHIEF OF STAFF BIN SHAKER ALLUDED AGAIN TO "SMUGGLING"
(WITHOUT PARTICULARS) AS POSSIBLE MOTIVE IN CONVERSATION WITH
AMBASSADOR. IF ABOUT-TO-BE-DISCOVERED COMPLICITY IN SMUGGLING
WAS MOTIVE, A HIJACKING WAS HARDLY NECESSARY TO ACCOMPLISH THE
OBJECTIVE, PARTICULARLY SINCE JORDANIANS HAVE WIDE EXPERIENCE IN
MORE DISCREET METHODS OF LEAVING TOWN.

6. AT THIS POINT, WE ARE INCLINED TO THIRD HYPOTHESIS: THAT
OPERATION WAS IDEALISTIC PROTEST BY SOMEWHAT UNSTABLE OFFICER
(AWRAN) AIDED BY TWO OTHERS AGAINST HIGH-LEVEL COVER-UP OF
CORRUPTION. MOST TELLING EVIDENCE IS REPORT FROM RELIABLE SOURCE
THAT AWRAN HAD EARLIER ATTEMPTED TO EXPOSE A CASE OF CORRUPTION
(DETAILS UNKNOWN) BUT HIS ATTEMPT HAD FAILED AS A RESULT OF
INACTION BY CHIEF OF STAFF GEN. BIN SHAKER OR HIS STAFF. (BIN
SHAKER EXPLAINED THIS AS TRUE, BUT THAT HIS INACTION WAS RELATED
TO FACT HE TIED UP WITH VISIT OF U.S.GENERAL ON DAY OF HIS
MEETING WITH AWRAN WHICH HAD TO BE POSTPONED). UNDER THIS THEORY,
AWRAN THEN HIJACKED PLANE OUT OF FRUSTRATION AND IN PROTEST
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AGAINST NEGLECT OF AFFAIR BY UPPER ECHELON. AWRAN'S OWN PROFILE
(LOYALIST, STAUNCH AND PERHAPS FANATIC MUSLIM ACTIVIST, UNSTABLE
PERSONALITY) LEND CREDENCE TO THIS INTERPRETATION. SECONDLY,
IN PAST WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN INCREASED GRUMBLING AMONG JORDANIAN
MILITARY OVER HIGH LEVEL CORRUPTION; IT IS THEREFORE PLAUSIBLE
TO IMAGINE HIJACKING SPRINGING FROM SUCH AN ATMOSPHERE. WEAK
POINTS IN HYPOTHESIS ARE: A) HOW COULD AWRAN PERSUADE TWO OTHER
SECURITY TYPES TO JOIN HIM? (PERHAPS AS IDEALISTIC ANTI-
CORRUPTION PROTEST?); AND B) IF SO, WHY DIDN'T HIJACKERS MAKE
VOCAL PROTEST OVER CORRUPTION UPON ARRIVAL IN LIBYA (COULD

LARG, WHATEVER ITS MOTIVE, HAVE SUPPRESSED SUCH ACTION)? IN FINAL
ANALYSIS, WE DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH INFO FOR
CONFIDENT ASSESSMENT BUT AT PRESENT LEAN TO LAST EXPLANATION.
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